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The Christian's Privileges

uties.

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506.

Blomfield.

Leaven Leaves.

"*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*"
GALATIANS v. 9.

THE CHRISTIAN'S

Privileges

AND

Duties.

By BISHOP BLOMFIELD.

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" But ye are a choſen generation, a royal prieſthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye ſhould ſhow forth the praiſes of Him who hath called you out of darkneſs into his marvellous light."—1 PETER ii. 9.

THE

CHRISTIAN'S PRIVILEGES AND DUTIES.

To the profane and worldly-minded man, ſuch a text of Scripture as that which I have juſt repeated is unintelligible: the confident and preſumptuous may pervert it to the foſtering of pride and an uncharitable ſpirit; but to the humble, ſerious, diligent Chriſtian, it conveys, together with abundant encouragement and conſolation, much of ſolemn admonition and of implied rebuke. In fact, no paſſages of Scripture are more awful to a

Chriſtian than thoſe which ſpeak to him of his privileges and dignities; for he knows the end for which he has been inveſted with them, the reſponſibilities which they involve, and the imperfect manner in which theſe reſponſibilities have been anſwered.

Every title of relationſhip or of honour which a reconciled God confers upon his adopted children, implies duties of correſponding importance: his meſſage of reconciliation, and his promiſes of grace, intimate his expectations of ſome adequate returns. "I have choſen you and ordained you," ſaid our bleſſed Lord to his apoſtles: Why? "That ye ſhould go and bring forth fruit" (John xv. 16). "Now are ye light in the

Lord," exclaims St Paul, in the language of congratulation: What then? "Walk as children of light" (Eph. v. 8).

No rule of equity can be more unqueſtionable, or of more univerſal application, than this—"To whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required" (Luke xii. 48). The Chriſtian, therefore, who knows the exceeding preciouſneſs and importance of the talents with which he has been put in truſt—who remembers that there has been given to him the pearl of great price—that he has within his graſp the unſearchable riches of Chriſt—cannot but tremble to think how little he may have profited by them. And when he recollects the ſurpaſſing dignities which are conferred

upon him by the Holy Spirit, who has deſignated him as "choſen of God, a joint heir with Chriſt, a prieſt, a king," he cannot but contraſt the realities of his own religious character with the ſpiritual perfections implied in all and each of theſe appellations, under a humbling ſenſe of his deficiencies.

At the ſame time he finds, in theſe deſcriptions of his privileges and immunities, abundance of encouragement and ſtrong conſolation. He reflects, that, if Chriſt has indeed wrought in him theſe glorious capacities, it could not have been with a view to his failure; that, if he muſt ſtill be contented to remain far from that perfection to which his ſoul aſpires, he is infinitely removed from

that ſtate of hopeleſs depravity and darkneſs in which he would have been, but for Chriſt. He knows, experimentally, that the titles of honour and affection, by which his relationſhip to God is acknowledged in the word of revelation, are not unmeaning phraſes, but expreſſive of bleſſed realities; that he has the power, if he will but uſe it, of diſtinguiſhing himſelf from the world, by characteriſtic marks, in each individual feature of that relationſhip, and of proving himſelf, as St Peter ſays, "a partaker of the divine nature, having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt" (2 Peter i. 4).

This, then, is the practical view which a Chriſtian is to take of his high and

holy calling, with a joint reference to its privileges and its obligations. Looking to the former, he feels his faith ſtrengthened, his doubts removed, his fears allayed, his hopes excited; while a ſurvey of the latter awakens him to diligence, preſerves him in a poſture of vigilance and prayer, and, ſeeking for ſpiritual aid, humbles his pride, keeps alive in him a ſenſe of ſin, quickens all his energies, maintains his godly reſolutions, and conducts him, with fear and trembling, through ſucceſſive ſtages of improvement and happineſs.

There is ſurely no perſon, pretending to be a Chriſtian, who has not, at ſome time or other, propoſed to himſelf theſe queſtions:—What is my Chriſtianity?

What has Jeſus Chriſt done for me? and what does he require of me? In what reſpect is my condition, with reference to my proſpects of the eternal world, and my duties in this, different from what it would have been, had Jeſus Chriſt never lived to inſtruct, nor died to redeem, mankind? Did I ſay that there is no perſon, profeſſing to be a Chriſtian, who has not propoſed to himſelf theſe queſtions? Alas! I fear there are thouſands to whom theſe momentous items of ſelf-inquiry have never occurred at all; unleſs, perhaps, in their youth, when they were propoſed to them in the ſtated forms of catechetical inſtruction, and anſwered mechanically, without any deep and ſerious feeling of their import-

ance. It may, however, be ſuppoſed, that almoſt every perſon here preſent, if aſked what Chriſt has done for him, would anſwer at once—He took our nature upon him, and died upon the croſs for our ſins. But would every individual, in making that anſwer, feel, in the very depth of his heart, that, for his own ſins in particular, as well as for thoſe of mankind at large, Jeſus ſuffered death; and that he himſelf, individually, has moſt righteouſly deſerved to undergo the penalty of ſin; and that he himſelf, individually, has been redeemed from it by Jeſus Chriſt; and ſo that he is perſonally indebted to that holy and merciful Saviour, to an amount ſurpaſſing the powers of human calculation to compute? And

then, if, in anſwer to the queſtion, What has Jeſus made us which we were not before? it ſhould be ſaid, he hath made us, "who in time paſt were not a people, to be the people of God" (1 Peter ii. 10); he hath conſtituted us "a choſen generation, a royal prieſthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people"—would all fully comprehend the meaning and force of theſe emphatic deſignations? We fear not: and we have a right to ſay that we fear; becauſe the real import of theſe terms is amongſt the things which are "ſpiritually diſcerned;" and there is no ſpiritual diſcernment of it where there is no practical exemplification of its beauty. One thing is certain, that under each of theſe deſcriptive appellations, the apoſtle

intended to ſpeak of Chriſtians as being ſomething which by nature they could not be; and by nature, undoubtedly corrupt as our nature now is, we are not a choſen generation, but a race of aliens and outcaſts, not a royal prieſthood, but unworthy to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water for the houſe of our God" (Joſhua ix. 21); not a holy nation, but "a people laden with iniquity" (Iſaiah i. 4). But all this, which as natural men we are not, as Chriſtians we *are;* and ſurely there is ſome meaning in the terms; and the difference between the two ſtates which they deſcribe is a real difference, a difference which muſt be felt and exemplified, and if we do not experience its reality in our feelings, our

motives, our hopes, in the bias of our wiſhes and the bent of our minds, the deſcription of the apoſtle—that is to ſay, the deſcription of the Holy Spirit himſelf—is not applicable to us; and then, what is our Chriſtianity; wherein is its ſubſtance; and what is the foundation of our hopes?

Let us now briefly compare the general deſcription which the apoſtle has given of our diſtinguiſhing privileges, with the ſymptoms which we manifeſt of our individual participation in them.

Firſt, then, we are a *choſen* generation. In a large and comprehenſive ſenſe of the term, all are choſen who have been bleſſed with an opportunity of hearing the meſſage of reconciliation delivered to

mankind by Jeſus Chriſt. Although that merciful and mighty Saviour died for the ſins of the whole world, although no limit was ſet to the proclamation of peace and good-will towards man, yet all who were at enmity with God have not been permitted to hear that gracious ſound; of "the people who ſat in darkneſs and in the ſhadow of death" (Luke i. 79), many nations and tribes have gone down, in ſucceſſive generations, to the grave, without having enjoyed even a diſtant glimpſe of the Sun of Righteouſneſs; while others, more highly favoured, have been choſen and elected out of the great family of mankind, to be the objects of a direct communication of light, and truth, and holineſs, in the Goſpel of

Jeſus Chriſt. Conſidered in this point of view, what a ſolemn reſponſibility does this chooſing and election of God impoſe upon thoſe nations who are the objects of it! If, by the free mercy of God, the "Gentiles which followed not after righteouſneſs, have attained to righteouſneſs, even the righteouſneſs which is of faith" (Rom. ix. 30),—if Iſrael, once the choſen of Jehovah, "hath not obtained that which he ſought for, but the election hath obtained it, and the reſt were blinded" (Rom. xi. 7),—with what irreſiſtible force does that reaſoning of the apoſtle apply to every Chriſtian church, in condemnation of its inconſiſtencies and deficiencies! "Behold the goodneſs and ſeverity of God; on them

which fell, ſeverity; *but toward thee goodneſs*, if thou continue in his goodneſs: otherwiſe thou alſo ſhalt be cut off" (Rom. xi. 22). It behoves us well to conſider whether, as a people who have been ſpecially called to a knowledge of the truth, who have now for more than three centuries liſtened to the teaching of our Lord and his apoſtles in its original and unalloyed purity and integrity, who have had continually ſet before us, in the confeſſion and ſervices of our Church, the whole counſel of God—whether, I ſay, we exemplify, as a nation, the peculiarity of our religious privileges, whether we deſerve, with reference to national character, the appellation of a truly Chriſtian people. Is a

regard for the honour of God and for the promotion of the Goſpel—a deſire to obey and to enforce his laws—a pervading principle of our public acts and proceedings? Every perſon who deſires the proſperity of his country, and its advancement in honour and ſecurity, will join with me in earneſt prayer that it may exhibit more decided marks of its having choſen the Lord for its God, in return for having been choſen by him to partake in ſo many ſpiritual privileges. This I would ſay of ourſelves, as a people —to each of the individuals who compoſe that people, ſo choſen, ſo honoured, ſo advanced, I would ſay — Remember, there is another kind of chooſing, on the part of God, beſides this larger and pri-

mary election: there is the chooſing of his individual ſervants, the election of thoſe who are to ſhare, not only in the privileges, but the ſalvation which is offered by Jeſus Chriſt: there is that "little flock," to whom "it is the Father's good pleaſure to give the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32), whom he has given to his eternal Son, "nor ſhall any pluck them out of his hand" (John vi. 39; x. 28). It was with reference to theſe two kinds of election that our Lord himſelf declared, "Many be called, but few choſen" (Matt. xx. 16). The former is the general proclamation of mercy to large maſſes of ſinners; the latter is its practical application to particular offenders, who hear it, and lay it to heart, and

ſet themſelves to comply with the terms which it propoſes, and to fit themſelves for the boon which it promiſes; and "they are called, and choſen, and faithful" (Rev. xvii. 14).

Now, we have reaſon to fear, or rather, I ſhould ſay, we are not permitted to doubt, looking at the aſpect preſented by modern ſociety, that too many reſt contented with the aſſurance that they are included in the former of theſe elections, without ever conſidering whether they have made the latter their own; and without ever ſo much as inquiring into its nature, its indiſpenſableneſs, the methods of its aſcertainment, the tokens by which it may be known to have taken place. It is the abſence of theſe tokens

and effects which juſtifies us in the aſſertion, that a large, a fearful, proportion of profeſſing Chriſtians remain ſatisfied with a general and outward calling. It is ſurely impoſſible for the moſt indulgent interpreter of human conduct, looking at the habits and purſuits of the many, to believe that they have been effectually choſen of God, given to Chriſt, born again of the Spirit, intimately and powerfully convinced of the evil and miſery of ſin, the vanity of the creature, the complete ſufficiency of their Saviour, their wills renewed, their hearts purified, their walk directed towards heaven. Yet that all this is neceſſary, if not to procure, yet to indicate and to certify, an effectual chooſing, and to ſtamp them as the

people of God, is as certain, as it is that there is a difference between a ſtate of nature and a ſtate of grace. If the Bible be the Word of God, this is true; and if this be a truth, how awful is the neglect of it in all ranks of ſociety! Of how few, amongſt the millions now purſuing the buſineſs of life in this country, who have the Goſpel preached to them, and are in that reſpect the choſen people of God, can it be ſaid, in any reaſonable ſenſe, that they are "giving diligence to make their calling and election ſure!" (2 Peter i. 10). Diligence enough there is; but it is, for the moſt part, a vicious, an impertinent, and a profitleſs diligence—a diligence which "hatches cockatrice eggs, and weaves the ſpider's web" (Iſaiah lix.

5), which "ſows the wind, and ſhall reap the whirlwind" (Hoſea viii. 7)—an exceſſive induſtry in the purſuit of pleaſure, of reputation, of worldly gain, but in the ſtudy of God's Word, in the uſe of his ordinances, in prayer, in charity, none at all. It is the peculiar duty of thoſe who are ſet for watchmen on the towers of Zion, to exhort and perſuade men not to reſt in the generalities of religion, nor to ſuppoſe that, becauſe they live in the profeſſion of it, and poſſeſs its privileges, and uſe its outward forms; they have, therefore, anything of its life-giving, ſoul-preſerving power abiding in them; but to ſearch diligently for the methods and appliances of perſonal religion; to cloſe with the gracious offers of Chriſt; to

place between themſelves and the world, out of which they have been choſen, a broad and decided line of diſtinction; and to give undeniable evidence of their election by a ſteady and conſiſtent walking according to the Goſpel rule. May that powerful Spirit, who has been promiſed, and is engaged to uphold the kingdom of Chriſt, bleſs our endeavours to diſpel the deluſions which prevail on this momentous ſubject, and to break down that mere conventional ſtandard of decency, and moderation, and honour, or whatever it may be called, which may, perhaps, ſerve for the purpoſes of our daily intercourſe with the world, as long as no trying emergency occurs, but which is not the ſtandard of Goſpel holi-

neſs, by which we are to walk here, and by which we are to be judged hereafter.

But let us briefly notice the other features of that apoſtle's deſcription: "Ye are a royal prieſthood—an holy nation —a peculiar people." Such ye are by right, in virtue of your covenant-connection with Chriſt; ſuch ye ought to be in fact, in virtue of thoſe aſſiſtances to which that covenant entitles you. St Peter here applies to Chriſtians thoſe terms of honour, which, from the giving of the law till its conſummation, had been excluſively appropriated to the Jewiſh people; but with a condition annexed, upon which, if they were ſuſpended in the caſe of an Iſraelite, undoubtedly they muſt alſo be ſuſpended

in the caſe of a Chriſtian. "Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye ſhall be a peculiar treaſure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye ſhall be unto me a kingdom of prieſts, and an holy nation" (Exodus xix. 5, 6). Under an animating and thankful ſenſe of the ſublime, but awful diſtinctions with which the adopted children of God are inveſted, the Chriſtian will join with him who ſaw the Apocalypſe in acknowledging the ſource of his honour. "Unto him that loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and prieſts unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever"

(Rev. i. 5, 6). But in what ſenſe are we prieſts? Unworthy as we are by nature to offer any ſacrifice to Him who alone is holy, we are yet qualified by our great High Prieſt to "enter with boldneſs into the holieſt," and to lay before the mercy-ſeat, in his prevailing name, the offering of a contrite heart, a full and excluſive faith, the reaſonable ſacrifice of ourſelves, our ſouls and bodies devoted to his ſervice; the tribute of prayer and praiſe; the oblations of benevolence and piety: nay more, we are enabled to bring out our darling ſins, the corruptions of our heart, chained by the energies of the Spirit, and ſlay them before the Lord. This, and more than this, is compriſed in the ſacerdotal office

of thoſe who have been anointed by the Spirit to be "an holy prieſthood, to offer up ſpiritual ſacrifices acceptable to God by Jeſus Chriſt" (1 Peter ii. 5).

But we are alſo a "peculiar people," as the Iſraelites were God's "peculiar treaſure." Specially under his protection, ſpecially entitled to his aid; but therefore ſpecially bound to honour and obey him, and to fulfil all the purpoſes for which he has ſet us apart from an unbelieving world, and conſecrated us to himſelf. If God has indeed conſtituted us his own peculiar flock, while the greater portion of mankind are yet left without the fold, what are his purpoſes? To ſave us, no doubt; but firſt to ſanctify us; the latter being the proxi-

mate, the former the final, end of the Goſpel diſpenſation. The firſt was effected by Jeſus Chriſt, with the ſecond in view. "He gave himſelf for us," ſays St Paul, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus ii. 14). Now the object for which we are thus diſtinguiſhed, choſen, crowned, anointed, conſecrated, ſet apart, is this: "that we ſhould ſhow forth the praiſes of Him who hath called us out of darkneſs into his marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9). And how is this to be done? Firſt, by an open profeſſion of Him before men; and then by a holy obedience; by living, not as though we were ſtill in darkneſs, but as being

thoroughly enlightened in the will of God; as having life and immortality before our eyes; and our duties not only traced as with a funbeam in the oracles of God, but written by the finger of God himſelf in our hearts. The light in which we walk is a "marvellous" light; and He who "commanded it to ſhine out of darkneſs" (2 Cor. iv. 6), expects that we ſhould walk by it firmly, ſteadily, and uprightly; "If a man walk in the day, he ſtumbleth not, becauſe he ſeeth the light of this world" (John xi. 9).

I beſeech you now to conſider, and with reference to your own particular caſe, how inconſiſtent with the character of a "choſen generation" is an en-

tire intercommunity and fellowſhip with that world out of which they have been choſen; how impoſſible it is that the devoted ſlaves of pleaſure, or faſhion, can appropriate to themſelves in any ſenſe (as ſurely in ſome ſenſe all Chriſtians ought to be able to appropriate it), that character of diſcipleſhip which the Saviour made a ſubject of a ſpecial thanksgiving to his Father; "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John xvii. 16). Conſider what praiſe of divine peculiarity can belong to thoſe, who are in no viſible feature diſtinguiſhable from the ſons of Belial or the ſervants of Mammon! What ſetting forth is there of the praiſes of God, as an enlightening God, by thoſe whoſe

demeanour is that of perſons from whom the divine perfections and the glories of the eternal world are ſhrouded by a thick impenetrable veil? Oh, let us labour more diligently than the beſt of us has ever yet laboured, to free ourſelves from the charge of this groſs inconſiſtency, "and to make our calling and election ſure" (2 Peter i. 10); ſo ſure, that its certainty may be not only felt by ourſelves, to our great and endleſs comfort, but recogniſed by others, to the praiſe and glory of God.

Heavenly Father, ſince thou, of thine own free grace and mercy, haſt choſen us to be the objects of thy gracious and wonderful revelations; haſt conſecrated us to a ſpiritual prieſthood; haſt natu-

raliſed us by baptiſm in the holineſs of thy Son's kingdom; haſt called us out of the darkneſs in which our forefathers walked, into the marvellous light of Goſpel truth; complete, we beſeech thee, by thy Spirit, the work which thou haſt begun in us; redeem us effectually from this evil world, and ſanctify us wholly to thyſelf!

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